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UNCLAS HANOI 000136

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Reclama to GVN on USAID program in Central Highlands

1. (U) On January 14, Ambassador raised with Deputy Foreign Minister Le Van Bang the GVN's unfortunate refusal to allow implementation of the Kontum provincial portion of a larger USAID-funded project on disabilities. Aware of the sensitivities of having a US-based organization carry out a project in the Central Highlands, USAID had even arranged for Save the Children-Sweden (Radda Barnen) to be the implementer in the Central Highlands. Local and provincial authorities initially approved the project, but it was then nixed at the national level, the Ambassador noted. (Note: USAID is unclear whether the refusal originated with the Communist Party or the GVN. End note) Ambassador explained that many in the U.S. and in the international donor community would now conclude that the GVN's policy was to refuse all USG assistance in the Central Highlands. He urged the GVN to reconsider and to agree to this purely humanitarian project, which had no political overtones and was consistent with the spirit of improving bilateral relations.

2. (U) DFM Bang (who did not appear well-briefed on this issue) agreed that this was a "real issue" and promised to raise it with GVN leaders and see how/whether this problem could be worked out.

3. (U) Comment: Embassy will continue to press the GVN to do the right thing and reverse this decision in the interests of the people of the Central Highlands and of better bilateral relations.  
PORTER